

**Willow River Parish: Clear Lake, Deer Park and Faith Family**

**Title: Love, the Most Important Commandment**

**Lesson: Exodus 20:1-17**

*<sup>1</sup> Then God spoke all these words:*

*<sup>2</sup> I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery; <sup>3</sup> you shall have no other gods before me.*

*<sup>4</sup> You shall not make for yourself an idol, whether in the form of anything that is in heaven above, or that is on the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. <sup>5</sup> You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I the LORD your God am a jealous God, punishing children for the iniquity of parents, to the third and the fourth generation of those who reject me, <sup>6</sup> but showing steadfast love to the thousandth generation of those who love me and keep my commandments.*

*<sup>7</sup> You shall not make wrongful use of the name of the LORD your God, for the LORD will not acquit anyone who misuses his name.*

*<sup>8</sup> Remember the sabbath day, and keep it holy. <sup>9</sup> Six days you shall labor and do all your work. <sup>10</sup> But the seventh day is a sabbath to the LORD your God; you shall not do any work—you, your son or your daughter, your male or female slave, your livestock, or the alien resident in your towns. <sup>11</sup> For in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but rested the seventh day; therefore the LORD blessed the sabbath day and consecrated it.*

*<sup>12</sup> Honor your father and your mother, so that your days may be long in the land that the LORD your God is giving you.*

*<sup>13</sup> You shall not murder.*

*<sup>14</sup> You shall not commit adultery.*

*<sup>15</sup> You shall not steal.*

*<sup>16</sup> You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.*

*<sup>17</sup> You shall not covet your neighbor's house; you shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or male or female slave, or ox, or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor.*

Today is the third Sunday in Lent. We experience seasonal changes from Winter and Spring during Lent. As the time of Lent approaches Easter, the weather gets warmer. Just as the warmth of spring can be felt more precious because of the cold of winter, we can feel the joy of Easter when we join in the Lord's suffering during Lent.

Today's theme is the Ten Commandments. For the people of Israel who escaped from Egypt, the Ten Commandments were constitutional and it contains a vision of how to live according to God's will, but also it provides the way to live like God's people.

The first Commandment tells who God is: "I am the Lord your God who brought you out of Egypt, out of the house of slavery." (2) This proclamation clearly states that the Lord is our Savior. God tells that I have freed you from the house of the slavery, and that you should not treat others and yourself inhumanely.

The Ten Commandments are not just moral and ethical records, but specifically God's love for humans and the path to salvation. Before these commands, if humans lived according to their desires, now we should live according to the values God wanted. Therefore, those who believe in God's salvation must keep his covenant. The Ten Commandments are constitution and covenant for those who believe in God.

The reason God gave humans his commandments was not to punish for violating it, but to lead the way of salvation and to save humans. God orders us to protect the oppressed, the poor, the weak and to form a community of justice and love. The Ten Commandments shows the way out of Egypt's slavery and a new community. The ten rules are a privilege and a sign of the covenant obtained to the people of God.

The Ten Commandments contains ten rules, but much of the first five books of the Bible, which we know as the Torah, spell out in vivid detail the rules for right and proper living in relation to God and to other people. There are 613 commandments, to be exact, with Jewish tradition claiming that the 365 "negative" commandments correspond to the same number of days of the solar year. The 365 commandments tell us what we must not do for 365 days every year. And, the remaining 248 "positive" commandments correspond to the number of bones in the human body.

Then why did God give us 10 commandments? This is my personal interpretation, but because people have ten fingers, the Ten Commandments summarize God's revelations in simple words to remember them easily enough for even children to remember.

The first four of the Commandments are about relationships with God, and the other six are about relationships with others. In short, it is God's commands to "love your God, love your neighbor." In today's scripture lesson, verses 3, 4, 7, and 8 are four commandments about God: No other gods, no idols, Don't misuse God's name, keep the Sabbath holy.

The most important commandment of the Ten rules is "You shall have no other gods before me." (3) The other nine commandments were derived from this first commandment. Again, the Ten Commandments are not laws to condemn or judge people, but it is the laws of blessing given to

humans by God to lead them to the path of life. Therefore, we must remember, worship, and rely on God for the rest of our lives.

The Ten Commandments tell us about our relationship with God and tell us to serve and love Him.

True relationship with God always causes love for others. Also, when we can truly love others, we can also truly love ourselves. The beginning and end of all kinds of love in this world is God's love.

The fourth commandment about sabbath is also God's word that we should live in the right relationship with God. "Therefore, the Lord blessed the sabbath day and consecrated it." (11) Historically, the people of Israel did not understand God's will well. They sometimes betrayed God's will and pursued the 'religion of the eyes'. So they tried to confirm the image of God and the form of God. However, our faith arises when we listen to God's words, so we must pursue 'the religion of the ears' that follows according to God's word.

Israelites did not realize the essence of faith and they were blinded by visually brilliant idols, and were fascinated by material things like Golden Calf.

Beloved, how have you been spending this season of Lent? Aren't you pursuing the religion of eyes like the people of Israel? Are you relying on God? Or is there anything you rely on more than God?

The people of Israel made and worshiped an idol called the golden calf. They believed it as God and followed it. In fact, not only the golden calf, but all the objects we rely on are idols. If we trust money, money is an idol. If we like listening to TV or radio more than God's word, TV and radio are idols to us. Traditionally, many people do fasting during Lent. By fasting during Lent, we check our relationship with God and more focus on it and stay away from the material factors that interfere with our relationship with God. However, fasting is not just about food. All the factors that interfere with our relationship with God are included in fasting.

Lent is the season of repentance. Jesus taught the people to repent and return to God's will. Jesus' sermon on the mountain, Beatitude, is a reinterpretation of the Ten Commandments and the Law of the Old Testament. It was not intended to modify the content of the law, but rather to complete it. "blessed are the poor in spirit, blessed are those who mourn, blessed are the meek, blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, blessed are the merciful, blessed are the pure in heart, blessed are the peacemakers, and blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake. (Matthew 5:3-10, NRSV)" Beatitude brings new values to those who love God and live for the kingdom of God.

What is really important is the principle of love. When there is no love in us, the absence of love is filled with fear. When we neglect to pray and read the Bible, and when we do not check our relationship with God, we become easily caught in fear. The problem is that fear makes idols, fear makes us neglect our relationship with God. So, I hope you to remember that God who loves us and what God gave us was love. The commandments God gave us is freedom to love. It is the freedom to love God, it is the freedom to love neighbors and it is the freedom to love ourselves.

The gracious love must rule us.

May God's love rule your life, and may it claim your life in the name of the Lord.